
Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 16 August 2017

by Rory Cridland LLB (Hons), Solicitor

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

Decision date: 29 August 2017

Appeal Ref: APP/Y3940/W/17/3169748

Land Adjoining Manor Farm, Froxfield, Wiltshire, SN8 3JY

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant outline planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Greatworth Developments Ltd against the decision of Wiltshire Council.
 - The application Ref 16/07815/OUT, dated 10 August 2016, was refused by notice dated 18 October 2016.
 - The development proposed is demolition of the two existing barns and replacement with one detached dwelling together with private amenity space, parking and associated works.
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Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matter

2. The application was submitted in outline, with matters relating to appearance, landscaping and scale reserved. I have dealt with the appeal on that basis, treating all plans as illustrative, except where they deal with matters of layout and access.

Main Issues

3. The main issues are:
 - (i) whether the site offers an acceptable location for the proposed development; and
 - (ii) the effect of the proposed development on the character of the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty ("the AONB").

Reasons

Location

4. The appeal site is located on the southern edge of Froxfield, a small village with limited services and facilities and situated approximately 3 miles from Hungerford, 7.5 miles from Marlborough and 13 miles from Newbury.
5. The Wiltshire Core Strategy (2015) (CS) defines Small Villages as having a low level of services and facilities and few employment opportunities. Accordingly, Policy Core Policy 1 directs development away from these areas and towards the larger settlements other than in a limited number of circumstances.

6. Furthermore, Core Policy 2 of the CS requires development to be delivered in the most sustainable manner. Proposals for development at the Small Villages will be supported where they seek to meet housing needs of settlements or provide employment, services and facilities provided that the development i) respects the existing character and form of the settlement, ii) does not elongate the village or impose development in sensitive landscape areas, and iii) does not consolidate an existing sporadic loose knit area of development related to the settlement. Even then, new development in Small Villages will be limited to infill within the existing built area
7. While I note the appellant's arguments regarding whether the proposal would constitute infill within the built up area, any such development must first demonstrate that it satisfies the first limb, that being that there is an identified need within the community.
8. In this case, the appellant accepts that there is no identifiable need for housing with Froxfield, however, claims to have identified a need within the wider Malborough Community Area. This need equates to around 4 dwellings per year until the end of the plan period. However, there is no substantive evidence that would indicate that the existing settlement strategy would not meet this need. Furthermore, there is no compelling evidence which would demonstrate that Froxfield will need to make any material contribution towards meeting it.
9. Accordingly, I do not consider there is any identifiable need which would support the provision of additional housing at this location. As such, I find that the proposal would not be in accordance with the settlement strategy set out in Core Policies 1 & 2 of the CS.

Character and appearance

10. The appeal site is located within the AONB. It is situated on the southern edge of the village south of Old Bath Road and forms part of the Savernake plateau. Key characteristics of this area include a low density scattered settlement of farmsteads and occasional villages set in a peaceful tranquil and secluded rural landscape. The site itself comprises a rectangular linear plot occupied by two adjoining barns and a smaller detached building. It consists of a narrow strip of land sited alongside a number of residential properties and, along with some of these properties, appears prominent in views from the nearby A4.
11. The proposal would involve the demolition of the existing agricultural barns, which, although large, integrate well into the rural surroundings. However, the introduction of residential development alongside, has, to some extent eroded this rural character and the neighbouring houses appear prominent in views towards the site from the nearby A4. The proposal would extend this ribbon of residential development further east into the neighbouring countryside. It would be clearly visible from the nearby A4 as well as in other local views. This would accentuate the impact of the existing residential dwellings and further erode the rural character of the wider village setting.
12. While I note the appellant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (together with an addendum) concludes that there would be an enhancement to the setting, any improvement resulting from the demolition of the barns would be outweighed by the harm that would result from the proposed replacement. It would be prominent in views from the nearby A4 and would appear out of keeping within this rural and sensitive landscape. Furthermore, although I

acknowledge that the measures proposed in the LVIA would provide some mitigation, AONB's have some of the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty and the Framework indicates that great weight should be given to conserving them. I do not, therefore, consider them sufficient to overcome the resultant harm.

13. Accordingly, I find the proposal would impact negatively on the character of the surrounding sensitive landscape. As such, it would be contrary to Core Policies 51 & 57 of the CS which, amongst other things, seek to ensure that new development is of a high quality design that relates positively to its landscape setting.

Other Matters

14. While I note that the appellant has identified a number of positive aspects of the scheme including a reduction on HGV traffic, ecological enhancements, some small support for local services and its contribution to overall housing supply, even cumulatively these benefits are moderate. These matters do not outweigh the impact on the sensitive landscape identified above or provide sufficient reason to set aside an up to date settlement strategy.
15. The appellant has asserted that the 2004 approval for the neighbouring development provides some support for further residential development at this location. However, this was permitted under a different policy context and does not provide support for the development proposed.
16. I note that the site was identified within the Council's Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (2012) as a potential site for development. However, that document does not form part of the adopted Development Plan. Accordingly, it does not have any material bearing on the determination of this appeal.

Conclusion

17. For the reasons set out above, and having had regard to all other matters raised, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

Rory Cridland

INSPECTOR